



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Fall Forward



Why I do Aikido is a question that takes me back to when I first started training. I remember walking into the dojo and feeling butterflies in my stomach. My reason for being there was to sign up right away and train, not just wait and see. I wanted to know what Aikido felt like. I wanted to learn technique and, I'll be frank, I wanted to learn to fight too. From the very beginning, I tried to develop an understanding of the art. Aikido is very complex and it really challenged me. The more I trained, the more profound the art became.

As I'm writing this essay, trying to find the words to convey my true intentions, I feel that it is hard to truly open up. Aikido, for me, has been the best thing that I have ever found. Ever since I became a student, Aikido has taught me every day how to be a student, how to be disciplined, and how to build physical strength and mental balance too.

Through training, I also discovered a lot about myself. In many ways I have change drastically. Training keeps me orderly, self-aware, humble, and keeps me moving forward mentally and physically.

Becoming a student of Aikido has been one of the most important decisions I have ever made. My goal is to learn the traditional way and learn the skills of the technique itself, which is why I keep practicing. I enjoy practicing all the techniques. I don't have a preference for any one in particular, because every time I tell myself, "Oh, I really like this technique!" later I find myself saying the same thing about another. My favorite thing is to spend time pondering and dissecting the techniques.

Aikido also has its challenges. I've confronted many major challenges since my childhood. My parents divorced when I was five years old. The instability that I carried afterwards, and my insecurities, made me grow up afraid of people. At age 12, I got hit by

a car and was in a coma. I almost lost my life not from own doing but because someone else couldn't understand that a red light means stop. The process of recovery wasn't easy, and I had no choice but to remain strong and face my fears with tears in my eyes. All that trauma that I experienced has changed me into becoming a deep thinker and I have the tendency to spend too much time in my head.

Aikido training gives me balance. Training has helped me in my search for all of those unresolved, unfinished, and unknown points that I have been avoiding all my life. Aikido is so distinctive to me, it has been one of the areas where I've learned a lot not just about Aikido but about life, and a lot of who I am. It has taught me to open my eyes and have the courage to confront those deeper aspects of myself. Aikido training is so powerful

that it has changed me into the person I am today. Training has shown me that compassion is not weakness,

but it prevails and it helps me to accept things as they come and as they are. But, most importantly, Aikido training has

shown me how to accept good and bad things with open hands.

I never thought I would be capable of sticking with Aikido and staying at the dojo all these years. I am enriched by friends and instructors that have the biggest hearts. I have an immense gratitude towards every individual at the dojo who has given me guidance and support. I'm glad that I found the dojo and Aikido and that I am a student at the Aikido Center of Los Angeles. My plan is to continue on my journey with Aikido, until life takes me away. As I am setting the example for future students, I hope that my children can develop the same appetite for knowledge, and to have the passion to pursue their life as Aikidoists too. I train because I have learned to enjoy my journey. •

Shodan Essay

by **Jacqueline Cruz** Shodan Candidate

An instructor from another Aikido dojo came to visit our dojo for practice and he wanted to ask a few questions. Chatting with him, I was glad to hear him say that he has decided to emphasize more training focused on *kihon-waza* in his dojo. Sometimes instructors feel obliged to make the classes more interesting or are eager to try something different or wonder how to catch the attention or hold the interest of the students. This is the current trend in Aikido and quite the normal practice, but both teacher and student must appreciate that we cannot get anywhere in Aikido without mastery of the fundamentals and these basic techniques must be constantly practiced, honed, and refined and brought to the highest level of the art.

When we watch great masters of the past demonstrate Aikido, they are not necessarily doing any strange or unusual techniques – we are in awe because “normal” Aikido techniques are brought to the highest level. When we watch lesser experts, they are always doing all kinds of strange and unusual and flashy things! After all these years, I am almost never impressed.

For Dan promotion tests, students can do whatever fancy techniques they want, but they are solely graded on the mastery of basic techniques. Over the years, I have come to realize that there is no limit in the study of fundamentals. The study of *kihon-waza* is infinite and profound and one can continue to study and discover something new throughout a lifetime of study. Many fancy techniques come and go but most times they are just tricks and tend to be superficial at best.

When we bow to O’Sensei’s picture before class, it is important not just to respect his photo, but his teachings, his techniques, and his judgments on what and how we should practice. It has been 35 years since he passed away (and maybe even longer depending on when you read this). It may seem like a long time, but from the perspective of history, it is not. Have we forgotten him already?

When we get bored in training, it is not that the training is getting monotonous or boring itself. What it means is that our mental attitude is incorrect. When something “feels” wrong, we should look to ourselves first in practice and not be so ready to blame others. Part of the discipline is to maintain the course of our training. To be distracted, lose interest, get bored, search for other interests, quit, or begin to fight or argue with others are all signs that one is not training correctly. Students should always keep in mind that Aikido is training of the spirit and mind, as well as the body.

We cannot think that Life is without pain, suffering, hardship, disappointments, or losses. We also cannot think that we will never get sick or suffer from some great problem or obstacle. We all must accept that we will eventually grow old and die.

It is the same in our Aikido training as well. We cannot think that our training will be without any hardship, or suffering, or that we will not have to endure problems or obstacles. Likewise,



Without Hardship



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

we cannot train without frustrations or disappointments. Like Life itself, difficulty is at the nature of everything we do in Life. Just like happiness, a little sadness is also a part of Life. We cannot say that sadness intrudes upon our happy life. No! It is an essential part of our lives, and we have to accept it and live it. When we understand that it is a part of us and not something from the outside which invades us, a great burden is lifted, and we can be a little free from this suffering.

Those who think that Aikido training is a rose covered Paradise live in a kind of fantasy world. I myself, like everyone, would rather have a Paradise than a Hell. This is only natural. But to separate Aikido from real Life will lead to many problems and greater disappointments later on; there is no way to avoid this. We meet what we encounter in our practice and continue to move on. Just like the small stream that continues to flow no matter what, to eventually become a great river and finally blend with the mighty ocean. We must continue to move on and flow with our Lives and continue to grow until we finally reach the great source and become one with the infinite. This is the meaning of the power of Life, and this is where the power of Aikido lies.

Please do not understand this in a negative way. This may be a bad example, but it is something like this. If we sit around all day and do nothing (like a king or prince), we think that we feel rested and privileged but actually we do not feel good at all. If we go out and work hard, we will be tired and frustrated, but somehow, we will feel good because we have accomplished something. Many students tell me that they feel better after practice no matter how tired they were when they first entered the dojo. Life can be very much like this.

We may exhaust ourselves with the many problems of Life, but the activity and effort should only strengthen us if we accept them positively as a part of our Lives. If we only feel disappointed and defeated with everything that we do, then we will surely be defeated.

The secret of Aikido, I think, is that in reality, no one can defeat us. We can only defeat ourselves. Even if someone beats us to the ground, we are only defeated when we decide to give up on ourselves. Even a tiny blade of grass has a magnificent Power of Life to survive and live and humans have an even greater power.

The great swordsman, Miyamoto Musashi, said that it is sad to see a fallen warrior with still one weapon, his short sword, still in its case unused. In other words, we should utilize all our strengths and talents (weapons) in our struggle. In Aikido, dive deep into the basics for they are the things which will require all of our inner strength and power and help us to bring meaning to our practice. •

Editor’s note: Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on May 15, 2003.



Aikido students practice defending against a variety of different attacks. There are techniques against both empty handed attacks and weapons attacks. Weapons attacks include defense against sword or *bokken*, staff or *jo*, and knife or *tanto*. Among empty-hand attacks, there are grabbing attacks against different targets of our body, as well as the three striking attacks: a cut to the front of the face (shomenuchi), a cut to the side of the head (yokomenuchi), and a thrust to the midsection (tsuki). Despite the variety of attacks in which the Aikido student trains, the most basic attacks (and the one most practiced) are the basic wrist grabs.

When we first see these attacks, they seem practical to us. They appear unique to Aikido. Our partner who is attacking, the *uke*, steps forward and grabs our outstretched wrist. I first thought, ‘No one is going to grab my wrist like that,’ much less grab both my wrists at the same time? Who is going to grab my collar like that or grab our wrists from behind? Furthermore, when we begin training against strikes, we experience the same thought: no one is going to come at us like that. We’re used to the type of punching and kicking we see in boxing or Karate, but when we see the type of strikes we train against in Aikido class, it’s difficult to see past how stylized and impractical they seem.

The way in which we attack in practice is an important part of mastering Aikido. When a beginner joins Aikido, the first usually starts with a basic wrist grab. But why? Why not start with

something like a punch? When done correctly and thoughtfully, these grabbing attacks impart very important lessons to our understanding of Aikido.

A Good Attack



by Ken Watanabe
Technical Director

When we look at the most basic grabbing attacks, our first thought is “break the grip!” and escape, but when we look at these types of grabbing attacks, it’s more than just holding on tightly to our partner’s wrist. From this attack, both *uke* or “the one attacking” or “the one who is being thrown or pinned,” and the *nage* or “the one doing the throwing or pinning,” aren’t trying to compete with each other practicing how to break the attack or avoid being grabbed. Both of these imply running away or escaping, not blending and connecting.

When grabbing their partner, the *uke* doesn’t simply hold on to make a good attack; that is just the bare minimum. The *uke* holds on to develop their grip, but also to develop their connection with their partner. As the *uke* practices keeping their grip, they develop flexibility in their movement and in their footwork, as they try keeping up with the *nage*’s movement. By maintaining their grip and following the technique, the student begins to learn how to read the *nage*’s movement. After learning how to use their grip to read the movement, they can begin seeing how to read their partner’s energy. These skills developed from practicing “good ukemi” are an important part of being a strong skillful Aikidoist.



Likewise, as the *nage*, when the *uke* grabs our wrist, we are also trying to develop our connection with them. From their grip we practice reading their movement and aligning with it. Instead of making it difficult for the *uke* to hold on, we try to make it easier for them to keep their grip. This might seem like a contradiction in the martial arts because it seems contrary to the idea of “defending” oneself. Why make it easier when we’re trying to defend ourselves from the grab?

Allowing the *uke* to grab and keep their grip while practicing how to develop our movement is the first step to developing connection. While maintaining this connection with our opponent, we can begin to see how we can draw their movement into our own movement. Once we learn how to match our movement with their grip, we can begin to see how to read their energy, lead it, and learn how to control their center from the point of attack – the grip. This is why on the most basic level of practice it’s important to keep this connection.

In some grabbing attacks, there are some Aikido techniques which break the attacker’s grip. In other martial arts, the idea behind breaking the grip is to escape or run away, but in Aikido, we don’t think of running away or escaping. In Aikido we think of using our connection to blend with the attack as we practice neutralizing the grip’s power over us. Even as we break the *uke*’s grip we maintain the connection with them. It is from these basic grabbing attacks that we begin to learn how to develop our connection with the opponent as well as learn how to develop our *kokyu* movement.

Once we understand this connection it doesn’t matter whether or not the attacker makes contact; the connection with the attacker becomes strong enough that we are able to lead their movement. This is where Aikido develops into the “no touch throw,” that is, being able to throw one’s partner without physical contact or by “not touching” them.

The other unique aspect of Aikido’s grabbing attacks is how the *uke* steps forward to attack. At the most basic level, the attack is completely static; the grab happens at the appropriate *ma-ai*, or

“spacing,” and there is no movement. In a more intermediate grabbing attack, the *uke* takes a single step forward, reaches out, and grabs the *nage*’s wrist. Once again, we wonder, “Is anyone going to grab us like that?”

Taking one step forward to grab is also an important part of our training. We are developing strong clear footwork as we step forward to grab. The way we step when attacking is often reflected in our footwork when it’s our turn to be *nage*. The other reason for the *uke* stepping forward is to help the *nage* to develop their timing and spacing against an opponent closing in strongly on them. The *uke* isn’t just practicing how to just grab; the *uke* is practicing how to step in effectively, using the grab to affect the *nage*’s center with their own center.

When we can begin attacking with our center as we move from it, then we can start throwing and pinning from our center with that same feeling. The skills between *uke* and *nage* – attacking and defending – are interchangeable and interrelated to each other as they both emanate from the center.

From the most basic grabbing attacks, we develop connection, timing, spacing, blending, positioning, extension, and how to use our center – every skill important to doing effective Aikido. From mastering these grabbing attacks, it’s easy to transition these skills to all other attacks.

Once, while I was chauffeuring both Furuya Sensei and another *shodan* back from dinner, he asked Sensei, “What do you do against street style attacks?” I was curious as well what the answer would be, but Sensei annoyingly answered, “All you need to do is practice the basic technique!” Practice the basic technique? That’s it? At the time I’m sure neither of us were satisfied with the answer, but I never forgot it.

These basic grabs are both basic techniques and advanced techniques in that how we negotiate the grab shows our level of training. As a training method, grabbing attacks are a vital part of our practice. We can practice techniques against grabs at both a basic level or at an advanced level, and from this kind of basic training, we can continue to refine our Aikido practice. •



In Aikido we usually talk about many concepts and ideas in class that are perhaps a bit confusing or difficult for the student to understand, and not because they do not understand the meaning, but because in practice their meaning tends to have slightly different nuances which they will only discover with time and practice.

One of these concepts is this idea of anticipation. In Japanese, to anticipate is referred to as *kuuki wo yomeru* (空気を読める) or to be able to “read the air.” In Aikido, we usually talk about anticipation in terms of getting ahead of the opponent when we execute the technique. However, in many cases it is not a matter of simply anticipating their movements which is the idea that most people think of when they are told to anticipate.

In a martial arts context, the concept of anticipation is more complex. Anticipation requires the student to have a certain level of prior knowledge to make their anticipation more effective as they perform the technique.

As a martial artist I believe that everything is connected, especially my daily life and my practice in the dojo, and I believe that they should not be separated. How we anticipate means having a certain way of looking at a situation as we read the things going on around us and then acting upon them. How we reflect and act in certain situations should be reflected in how we have learned to act in our martial arts training.

From a professional point of view (some of you know that I am a firefighter) this concept of anticipation is essential to the success in possibly dangerous situations. My job is to assess situa-

tions and come up with the best possible scenarios to solve them with the least amount of injury or loss of life.

When we arrive at a fire, there are things that we have to solve immediately due to their severity. To anticipate properly, we need training but more importantly we need to be able to read any information which could help us. For example, the color and quantity of the smoke, the color of the flame, any sounds that are coming from the structure, if there are any open doors or windows that could facilitate ventilation, or if there are any chemical products inside. Most importantly, we need to know if there are any potential victims inside. All of these things need to be assessed so that we can have everything ready to be able to anticipate a multitude of different scenarios.

Anticipate



by **Santiago Garcia Almaraz**
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

Anticipation doesn't have to be for dire situations like a fire, and we do use it in many different aspects of our daily lives. For instance, when we drive down the road and approach an amber or yellow traffic light, in just a moment we must anticipate if we should brake immediately or just slow to a stop. If we are being attentive and slow down because we know that the traffic light will turn red, then our action must be controlled and practicing progressive braking in a natural way so as to make the transition smoothly and comfortably. Another example of anticipation is when we cook. After deciding what to best serve our guests, we must prepare the ingredients by cutting, heating, or cooking so that we can smoothly go ahead to the next step in the recipe. Knowing how to prepare or anticipate enables us to add the ingredients at the right time so that the food will taste good.



In Aikido it works exactly the same way. When we are in front of our opponent, we have to know “the recipe” in how to deal with them. We move in just the right way so that everything goes smoothly and coherently.

It is also good to remember that anticipation is not improvisation. Improvisation implies doing whatever we want. Anticipation from a martial arts point of view must be based upon repetitive training which gives us a certain type of intuition so that we learn how to read our opponent and our environment.

Anticipation can and should be applied to all techniques. For example, in terms of *kokyunage*, we must not interfere in the attack so that the *uke* comes towards us and that their movement is not hindered by my movement but directed by it. If the *uke* is unsure about where to move or if we force them to move in an unnatural way for that attack, then they could stop or not continue advancing. So when we move it has to be subtle, firm and consistent, which enables us to get off the line of their attack and helps us to control their movement from the beginning of the attack to the end result, whether a control hold, a throw or any other action. We can see this when a person attacks with *shomenuchi* and we neutralize the attack with *ikkyo*. When we are attacked, we do not wait for the blow to be over our heads before we move. We have to anticipate the power, strength and

trajectory of the blow in order to identify what is the precise moment to place ourselves in the correct position, with the correct hand position, in order to execute *ikkyo* properly.

This is why continuous practice is so important to the concept of anticipation. By being consistent, we unknowingly add experience and knowledge to our technique. Obviously, this process takes many years and at first we must think about each step to learn the technical part of what we are doing, where the feet go, the placement of our hands, how to move the hip, etc. Then little by little, we will see how that information begins to inform our movements and change how we move during the technique depending on how our partners attack us.

In practice, it is often thought that anticipation is moving quickly, but nothing is further from reality. Anticipating is moving at the right moment with the correct purpose, direction and positioning depending on the attack and its speed, direction, and power. To anticipate properly, it is essential to know the technique well and we can only learn to “know” the techniques by practicing consistently and having an open mind. If we do not practice regularly or consistently, then we won’t be able to read the air, we won’t be able to anticipate the movements of our opponents, and we won’t be able to anticipate the things that happen in everyday life. •

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

Dojo Coronavirus update:

Currently, the City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles has lifted the face mask mandate for all persons vaccinated or not. Anyone who still wants to wear a face covering in class is welcome to do so. There is also no vaccination requirement to attend classes.

IMPORTANT DATES

November 23-26 (Wednesday-Saturday): Dojo CLOSED Thanksgiving

November 26 (Saturday): Special Post Thanksgiving class 10:15 AM

December 3 (Saturday): Dojo Christmas party at 6:30 PM

December 17 (Saturday): Osoji - Year end clean up at 8:00 AM

December 18 (Sunday): Mochitsuki at Zenshuji at 6:30 AM

December 23-26 (Friday-Monday): Dojo Closed Christmas

December 31- January 3: Dojo Closed New Year's

The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles (ACLA) admit students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender identification, national or ethnic origin or sexual orientation in administration of their educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.

Aikido Training Schedule

合気道 時間割

Saturdays

10:15-11:15 AM Advanced
11:30 AM-12:30 PM Theory

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular
8:30-9:30 PM Fundamentals
At Terasaki Budokan

Sundays

9:00-10:00 AM Children's Class
10:15-11:15 AM Regular
11:30 AM-12:30 PM Fundamentals

Thursdays

6:30-7:30 PM Open

Mondays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Tuesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Weapons

NOTE: Visitors are welcome to observe our Fundamentals, or Regular Classes.

Iaido Training Schedule

居合道 時間割

Saturdays

8:00-9:00 AM Regular Class

Tuesdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class

Thursdays

7:45-8:45 PM Regular class



The Aiki Dojo

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The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

has been awarded Official *Konin* recognition by the Aikikai Foundation, Aikido World Headquarters.

Our dojos are committed to the study and practice of the teachings of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba and his legitimate successors, Nidai Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, the present Doshu, Moriteru Ueshiba and Hombu Dojo-Cho, Mitsuteru Ueshiba.

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Aikido
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We are a not-for-profit, traditional Aikido dojo dedicated to preserving the honored values and traditions of the arts of Aikido and Iaido. With your continued understanding and support, we hope that you will also dedicate yourself to your training and enjoy all the benefits that Aikido and Iaido have to offer.

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